Praise be to the Almighty Allah, and Peace be upon Prophet Muhammad.

Dear Friends!

I am thankful to the sponsors of this important conference who have invited me to preside over the inaugural session. For a pragmatist, who harbours no illusion about himself this opportunity to express his views, and to be heard with earnestness and confidence carries great value. The beginning of any movement or organisation may be very innocent to look at but is very significant as the inception has long term effect on its future course of action. I pray to Allah to make us worthy of confidence that is being placed in us.

Dear Friends,

Today the nation and the *millat* (Muslim community) are confronted with crises that occur only once in a century or even more. Unless an early notice is taken of the situation, the community may lose its identity, religious freedom, its glorious heritage (*madrassas*, institutes, language and literature). The nation too faces ruination as hatred, mistrust, diffidence, losts of value of human lives and dignity, are increasingly in evidence. We Indians have also begun to be swayed by sentiments, short-

term interests, and hollow slogans. We have developed the trait of putting the self above the nation. All these slowly eat the vitals of a nation and annihilate it completely. The communal riots, narrow vision, selfishness, an inflated ego and sense of superiority and high degree of inflammability are traits that cannot remain confined to a particular group or community. Once fire of hate and jealousy begins to consume the self if fuel is supplied to it constantly. A pre-Islamic Arab poet had summed it in the following words:

> The fire begins to consume itself if it
> runs short of fuel.

The political parties have grown accustomed to look at all the issues from political angle. The electoral dividends are the only yardstick for action. They seek their benefits out of destruction, their own unity in country's disunity, and their own progress in country's loss. Things have declined to such a degree that human lives are sacrificed at the altar of vague political objectives, narrow self-interest, temporary and doubtful gain of power; scores of houses are consigned to flames and thousands of children are orphaned in response to slogans, posters and speeches, and venom is spewed out by communal leaders which is abetted by revivalist slogans, distorted history, wrong education and anti-national and dishonest press. The poison percolates down the psyche of lakhs and lakhs of innocent citizens of this country. They have poisoned the young minds of the

new generation and made them so intolerant and inflammable that the country has turned into a powder keg, ready to explode any moment.

What I am pointing at is clear: it is Hindu revivalism; to revive the historical discords; to whip up passions with reference to centuries old developments (good or bad) which were tolerated by the pragmatic, magnanimous and self-respecting people of this soil for centuries. It will land this country into new difficulties. The tendency to seek revenge and compensation for them today will bring us in confrontation with new problems. Our energies will then be wasted. The country today requires constructive work, unity, integrity and communal solidarity. History is a sleeping tiger which should not be awakened. One should bypass it silently. The reversal of history, exhuming the dead (conversion of the religious shrines) etc. are not wise steps. The nation just cannot tackle them in the present circumstances. The country can ill afford fresh and complex problems which will slacken its pace of progress.

The British who ruled us illegetimately after setting their feet from overseas, could have done so only by terrorising the local folk. They, therefore, set up such an agency, the police. Every self-respecting man is scared of them. Not only that they avoided any moral training of these men in uniform, but trained them for striking terror in order that every noble and gentle soul keeps distance from them.

We Indians, when in power, should have arranged for the moral training of our police in order that they imbibe human traits and develop into an institution that could be looked for assistance, sympathy and service without the least iota of prejudice, discrimination and partisan role in the communal riots and social strife.

Then we have also been consistently appealing against any kind of interference in the Muslim Personal Law and the rights of their centres of learning, institutes and cultural institutions. The rights of the Minorities are fully guaranteed by our Constitution and they need not be annulled at any account. The Muslims of India have time and again demonstrated their sensitivity on this score and in more explicit terms than any Muslim majority in some other country would express. Several of these Muslim institutions are commended in Muslim countries and earn great respect for India's secular tradition. The religious freedom enjoyed by Muslims in India does not constitute any threat to public order. Any administrative or legislative measure which impinges on this freedom may cause discontent among Muslims and hinder their full-scale participation in the nation's progress.

Finally a word on the moral decay in India. The hysteric craze for wealth is the root cause for this crisis. Profitability has come to be the central motive of each action of a very significant section of the society. It disregards even national interest and does

not feel qualms in crossing limits of morality, religion, reasonableness, the law and the constitution. Disorder, chaos, lawlessness and corruption plague all departments of life and administration. Cynicism attains its height when people narrate gleefully the order, discipline and facilities available during the British colonial rule over India and sometimes even begin to covet its return. This must be proof enough of the failure of the parties that have held the reins of the government and should make us hang our heads in shame.

Dear Friends,

This analysis of the situation obtaining in the country though paints a bleak scenario, was quite essential. We, as a community carry the divine assignment of ensuring peace and justice in the society by service, demonstration of patriotism, human qualities etc. besides preserving our identity. We must therefore have a clear vision of our goal and message.

According to an Urdu couplet:

A Muslim's religion demands from him introspection into the universe.

The same poet sets out another duty in another couplet

O thou, architect of the Sanctum, stand up once

again to renovate this world.

The Holy Prophet had likened the Muslim ummah to a two tiered boat wherein the elite and the well-to-do sections occupy the upper tier while the resource-less share the lower tier. If the thirsty folk downstairs are denied access to the stored water on the upper tier, they may be provoked into securing their supplies by boring a hole through the bottom of the boat. But by doing so they will be endangering the lives of all the people, the elite as well as the poor.

The simile applies to Muslims too. It is our patriotic duty to plug the hole created by the ignorant in the national boat that carries us all, the Muslims and the other countrymen. We owe this duty to ourselves on account of our being the guide and the sense of human welfare with which we have been endowed. The Quran lays down the duty in the following words:

> O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God, as witnesses to fair dealing
>
> (Q.V:10)

Allah appointed the small team of mujahideen (migrants) who had arrived in Madinah from Makkah, though few in numbers, as guides for the humanity that stood on the verge of an abyss. They were assigned the tasks of conveying the message (dawah), reform the faithful by uniting themselves into a homogenous society held together by a common

mission and cooperation. They were instructed in the following words:

> Unless ye do this, (protect each other), there would be tumult and oppression on earth, and great mischief.
>
> (Q.VIII:73)

Having commented on the situation which surrounds this community and the crises it confronts, let me place before you a few observations.

Muslims are enjoined not merely to live and die by the religion they follow, but to arrange its continuance in their progeny in order that they too are able to lead their lives by the tenets of Islam and achieve success in the hereafter. The Quran on the one side enjoins you to:

> O ye who believe! Fear God as He should be feared, and die not except in a state of Islam.
>
> (Q.II:102)

Whereas in another verse it says:

> O ye who believe! save yourself and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones.
>
> (Q.LXVI:6)

The fact that our children have to receive an education wherein instruction clashes with the basic

tenets of Islam such as *tauheed* and impart polytheism and mythology of other religions, our responsibility to guide the younger generation gets greatly enhanced. To put it plainly this kind of education deprives us of our faith. The curriculum, the mode of instruction, the literature, the press, the radio and the TV all add up to their injurious influences on the child. It is not merely a cultural genocide. It is the genocide of an ideology and its followers. The situation calls for immediate action by Muslims to organise and arrange the primary education of their new generation which could spiritually regenerate them and provide for ideological sustenance. Sometimes it should take precedence over the more basic necessities such as clothes, general education and medical care. In this context, our concern for our progeny's faith should be akin to that of prophet Hazrat Yaqub (peace be upon him). Prophet Yaqub had descended from a chain of prophets. He had asked his children:

> Whom would you worship after me?
>
> They said: We shall worship thy God and the God of thy fathers.
>
> (Bagrah. 133)

It is therefore that the primary religious education of the younger generation should be taken up by Indian Muslims with priority on a par with other essentials of life. For this they should set up independent schools; promote religious atmosphere in homes;

educate their womenfolk about Islam and through them the younger generation. The stress should not be merely on creating awareness but inspiring love and affection for Islam, its principles, its prophets and an urge to emulate their lives. Simultaneously there should be attempt to inform them of the negative influences of polytheism and infidelity.

Teaching of Urdu should also receive attention. It treasures our religious and literary heritage and it ranks next to that in Arabic. In certain departments, it even excels Arabic. Loss of Urdu will result into detachment of Muslims from their history and culture. Similar is the case of script. Change of script too will put the literary heritage beyond the access of a people and thus a whole world of wisdom and knowledge will be rendered irrelevant for the coming generations. Renowned philosopher Toynbee writes:

> Whether or not Arab conquistadors burnt the historic library of Alexandria, the same need not be repeated now if one at all has to destroy a treasure trove of knowledge. You just need to change the script of a language[1].

It is why we need to retain and preserve Urdu's original script and need to set up centres for its teaching and promotion.

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1. It is merely an allegation against Arab and Muslim conquerors. Please refer to the 'Maulana Shibli's well researched book entitled "Kutbkhana Iskandriya" Even Philips K. Hitti has rebutted it in his book "A Short History of Arabs".

The Islamic family law is part of the Muslim's faith. It is revealed by the same God who has given us the tenets of faith and other codes. The Quran is replete with such explanations. Muslims are compelled to have faith in it. They cannot continue to be termed Muslims without it. It is therefore, clear that this law has been formulated by Allah, the creator of the universe. He has full knowledge of man's natural requirements and weaknesses.

> Should He not know, — He that Created?
> And He is the One that understands the finest mysteries (and) is well-acquainted (with them).
>
> (Q.LXVII:14)

He is the creator of time too. Howsoever, we may consider it necessary to divide the time into past, present and future, for Allah it is only past and past. After having recognised that the law is the creation of Allah for a living body of people who constitute a universal community, the demand to change it carries in itself a logical contradiction. And for a Muslim, it constitutes hypocrisy.

The call against the change in the Islamic law is not merely borne out of our blind faith or highly sedimented prejudices. Instead, it emanates from the long experience which has established its comprehensive, all-embracing and just nature. Its quality of transcending time and space, the empirical and rational evidences of its credibility and applicability, the

pronouncement by the oriental and occidental jurists with regard to its accuracy and practicability provide enough documentation. Several legal experts have complied invaluable tomes on the Islamic law. All these cannot be glossed over while evaluating the Islamic law's relevance.

When the question of change in Muslim Personal Law arose and clouds of suspicion loomed over the horizon, the Muslim Ulama and intellectuals formed the "Muslim Personal Law Board" by gathering at a united platform in this very city of Bombay in December, 1972. It was clearly a precautionary measure against the danger of sudden ambush over the Muslim Personal Law from the official quarters. It was also aimed at making a periodical evaluation of the trend of legislation in the country. It was a representative board and perhaps after the Khilafat Movement (1921), it was the broadest ever platform of Muslims. The public sessions of the Board had drawn record crowds of listeners which were unprecedented in the post-independence history of India. The Government soon knew that the Muslims were unequivocally against any change in the MPL. Even the handful who had periodically demanded a change, gauged the community's mood and opinion and their own worth. Wisdom and pragmatism therefore should now counsel circumspection and restraint even for those who would like to kick up a row on the issue. However, there should be no room for complacency. The electoral politics, the expedient ways of our communal political parties and experience of legislature

call for a constant vigil.

Finally I must draw your attention towards the societal reforms. Muslims have grown accustomed to several perversions in their family law. Several distortive practices and vulgar display of wealth etc. have gained roots in our society. Several of them have been directly emulated from our co-countrymen. The demand for dowry from the bride's parents and extravagance are some of the traits that must have been alien to us. They have been borrowed from the contemporary *'Jahilliya'*. It is causing anguish to the parents and spawning an army of aging spinsters. It is a social powder-keg. The suppressed feelings vent themselves through suicides. Some such incidents have taken place in families known for their noble traditions.

There is need for an effective movement for societal reform among Muslims which should start from the mosques and radiate to its immediate localities, towns, villages and bring about a major revolution in the conscience as well as consciousness. It should alter our standards of dignity and nobility, dissuade the people from competitive demonstration of opulence, pomp and fanfare. Muslims should, instead, return to the straight and easy path of Islam and the simple ways of the Prophet.

I conclude with these few submissions. Let me state clearly that it is our responsibility to convey to this country and the contemporary world the great